RULES GOVERNING THE RECEPTION OF GROUPS OF VISITORS AND THE EUROSCOLA, EUROMED-SCOLA AND EURONEST-SCOLA PROGRAMMES

BUREAU DECISION

OF 16 DECEMBER 2002[1]

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[1] Consolidated on 3 May 2004, modified by the Bureau Decisions of 3 July 2006, 10 October 2007, 7 July 2008, 2 February 2011, 30 November 2011, 26 February 2013, 24 October 2016, 18 January 2021, 11 September 2023, 2 October 2023, technically updated by the Bureau on 15 July 2024 and further modified by the Quaestors on 27 November 2024 pursuant to Articles 13(1), 17(3) and 18(4) of the present Decision.

THE BUREAU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to Rule 25(2) of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

TITLE I: PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES AND DEFINITIONS

The aim of these rules is to ensure the smooth running and timely organisation of the various types of group visit to the European Parliament.
The rules take account of logistical, organisational, financial and security-related matters in the context of the rapidly growing number of group visits to Parliament.

Article 1

1. The European Parliament, which is elected by direct universal suffrage, considers that, in accordance with the principle of transparency, it is of essential importance to the exercise of democratic rights in the European Union for members of the public to be granted access to its proceedings and premises, raising their awareness on EU matters and encouraging their engagement with the European Parliament.

2. It therefore organises visits to its three places of work in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg.

3. The aim of the programme of visits set up by the European Parliament is to provide members of the public with information about its responsibilities and workings and on the European Union's institutional set-up and policies.

4. Subject to the conditions set out in these rules, any citizen of the European Union and any national of an applicant country or former Member State as well as any third-country national resident in a Member State who is at least 14 years of age on the date of the visit, as regards individual visits, visitors' groups and Euroscola, or at least 16 years of age on the date of the visit, as regards EuroMed-Scola and Euronest-Scola, may take part in these programmes.

   Exemptions from this rule may, where appropriate, be granted by the Quaestors. Derogations to this rule, for up to three persons per visitor group, may be granted by the Head of the Visits and Seminars Unit.

   In connection with the EuroMed-Scola programme, young people from countries on the southern and eastern Mediterranean littoral who are nationals of member or observer countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership may also take part. In connection with the Euronest-Scola programme, young people who are nationals of the countries participating in the Eastern Partnership policy may also take part.

5. Unsponsored, independent groups from outside the EU may be granted a visit subject to the availability of rooms and speakers.

6. Access to Parliament's premises is free of charge, without prejudice to the Rules governing events on European Parliament premises.

Article 1a

For the purpose of these rules:

1. “Sponsored group” means a group of visitors that is officially invited by a Member or the Directorate General for Communication.

   A sponsored group invited by:

   a) a Member of the European Parliament (hereinafter referred to as “Member”), referred to as “Member’s sponsored group”;

   b) the Directorate-General for Communication, as part of:
      1. a Group of Opinion Multipliers;
      2. the Euroscola program;
      3. the Euromed-scola program;
      4. the Euronest-scola program;

   referred to as “other sponsored group”.

   Only a sponsored group may receive a financial contribution under the conditions set out in the present rules.

   A sponsored group may include non-sponsored visitors, referred to as “accompanying visitors”.

2. “Non-sponsored group” means a group of visitors that has not been officially invited within the meaning of paragraph 1. It can refer to a:

   a) non-sponsored group invited personally by a Member, referred to as “Member’s non-sponsored group”;
   b) non-sponsored independent visitors group, referred to as “independent visitors’ group”;

3. “Non-sponsored individual” means a person who, on an individual basis, without prior invitation, asks to visit the European Parliament’s premises, referred to as “individual visitor”.

4. “Head of group” means the individual designated by the Member or a travel agency who is present at the day of the visit of a group officially sponsored by a Member. The head of group may be:

   a) a member of that group;
   b) an Accredited Parliamentary Assistant (hereinafter referred to as “APA”);
   c) a local parliamentary assistant;
   d) a person appointed by a travel agency.

TITLE II: TYPES OF GROUP AND RECEPTION PROCEDURES

II. a) Members’ sponsored groups

Article 2

1. Members’ sponsored groups shall receive a financial contribution under the programme of visits run by the institution. Members’ sponsored groups shall be made up of sponsored visitors, the number of whom shall form the basis for calculating groups' financial contribution entitlements. Members’ sponsored groups may include non-sponsored visitors,

referred to as accompanying visitors (the number of whom is not included in the calculation of financial contribution entitlements).

The inclusion of accompanying visitors in a Member's sponsored group shall not entitle a Member to additional sponsored visitors over and above the annual quota given in paragraph 2.

2. Each Member may sponsor up to 100 visitors per year. Members are required to complete and submit the relevant application in accordance with the procedure established in Article 6.

3. Each group shall comprise a minimum of 10 visitors sponsored by a Member. The maximum number of visitors shall depend on the capacity of the rooms to be used and the number of seats available in the public gallery.

   A head of group shall be designated for each visitor group.

   Members may sponsor up to five groups per year. Members may only sponsor one group per plenary session in Strasbourg and one per year for Brussels plenary sessions because of limited meeting room and gallery space. Waiting lists will be established and slots reallocated in the event of cancellations.

   Members shall submit a list of group visitors indicating names and other required personal data, in the appropriate online form, to the Visits and Seminars Unit (DG COMM) and the Security Unit (DG SAFE) two weeks before the visit with a view to allowing time for financial and security related arrangements by the relevant services. The appropriate online form is provided by DG COMM following data protection standards.

   The purpose of the programme of visits is to benefit and reach out to the highest possible number of citizens. Repeated visits by the same participants shall therefore be avoided. This does not apply to heads of groups or justified cases, such as persons accompanying minors or people with a disability.

4. Visits by Members' sponsored groups shall comprise:

   - a lecture during which an official or other servant of the European Parliament provides an introduction to the workings and activities of the European Parliament;

   - a talk by one or more Members with audience participation;

   - a visit to the hemicycle gallery; and

   - a visit to the Parlamentarium or the House of European History.

   Groups receiving a financial contribution should participate in the entire programme in their set rooms in the visitors' area.

5. Members who have invited visitors should meet their guests, since their participation is essential to the success of the programme of visits run by the institution.

6. Members' sponsored groups shall receive a financial contribution in accordance with the provisions of Articles 13 to 23 of these rules.

7. No unused invitations from the annual quota may be carried over from one year to the next. Likewise, the remainder of several Members' quotas may not be combined.

8. During election years, the quota of invitations shall be broken down as follows: no more than 50 visitors during the first half of the year and no more than 50 during the second half. Re-elected Members may carry over the remainder of their quota into the second half of the year.

9. Any invitations not used up by a Member who leaves Parliament during a parliamentary term shall be passed on to his/her successor, who shall honour any commitments entered into by his/her predecessor.

II. (b) Members' non-sponsored groups

Article 3

1. A Member's non-sponsored group shall be of more than nine visitors invited by a Member outside official visitors' programmes. No financial contribution is granted for these visits.

2. (a) The Member concerned shall be authorised to invite such groups, subject to prior reservation of a conference room in the area reserved for visitors, or, if no room is available there, in another part of Parliament's premises, subject to the Rules governing events on European Parliament premises adopted by the Bureau[2]. If the group is invited only to a lunch/dinner in the Members' restaurant/salon, no room is required, but proof of a restaurant booking must be provided for security purposes. Access shall be granted via the designated entrances in Brussels and Strasbourg.

   b) If no conference room/restaurant capacity is available on the date required, access to Parliament's premises shall not be granted, except under the conditions referred to in Article 5 of these rules. In such cases, the Member concerned will be offered an alternative date.

3. (a) Due to the limited number of meeting rooms and gallery space in relation to the large number of visitors wishing to come to Parliament, Members are advised to send requests for reservation to the Visits and Seminars Unit four weeks in advance[3]. Later requests will be accepted subject to room capacity being available.

   b) The request for reservation shall be processed by the Visits and Seminars Unit (Directorate-General for Communication).

   c) If no meeting room allocated to the visitors' section of the PHS in Brussels or the LOW in Strasbourg is available on the requested date, availability of a room allocated to the political group of the Member concerned shall be checked. As these rooms are allocated as a priority to the official political activities of the groups, the Member concerned shall be informed, in the event of availability, that the confirmation is made subject to unforeseen official group activities.

   d) If requested by the Member concerned, alternative solutions/dates for the planned visits may be proposed, as indicated in paragraph 2 of this article.

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[2] Requests for a meeting room initiated by an external body and supported by one or more Members are governed by the Bureau Rules governing events on European Parliament premises and will be forwarded to the relevant service of the Directorate-General for Logistics and Interpretation for Conferences (DG LINC).

[3] The reservation form is available at: https://visiting.europarl.europa.eu/en/visitor-offer/brussels/book-the-hemicycle

4. For security reasons and in order to guarantee the timely organisation of the visit, the booking confirmation, together with the final list of the group of visitors, complete with the names and other required personal data of all visitors, should be submitted on the appropriate online form to the Visits and Seminars Unit and to the Security Unit no later than one week before the date of the requested visit. The appropriate online form is provided by DG COMM following data protection standards.

   The Security Unit will prepare access badges in advance for those groups leaving the visitors' area. If the list is not provided in good time before the visit, the visit may have to be cancelled for security reasons. A copy of the list must also be presented on the day of the visit.

5. (a) The Member concerned, or his/her expressly designated assistant, shall remain solely responsible for the group throughout its stay, in particular when meeting the group on arrival and when accompanying it back to the visitors' area at the end of the visit.

   b) When a Member requests that his/her visitors' group be authorised to leave the visitors' area to attend a meeting, either of a parliamentary committee or in a conference room reserved in advance by his/her assistant, the group must be accompanied by an official EP guide (or by the Member or the assistant), who will escort it directly to the meeting room and back again to the visitors' area at the end of the visit. This measure shall be respected for security purposes and to avoid congestion in Parliament's buildings.

6. (a) All such visitors' groups shall enter and leave Parliament's premises via the designated entrances in Brussels and Strasbourg where facilities for visitors, such as cloakrooms, shop, restaurant, bar, exhibitions and conference rooms, are available.

   b) Visitors' groups invited solely for lunch/dinner in the Members' restaurant/salons and arriving together shall use the designated entrances in Brussels and Strasbourg.

II. c) Groups of Opinion Multipliers

Article 4

1. Groups of opinion multipliers invited by the Directorate-General for Communication shall mean: groups invited by the Visits and Seminars Unit and made up of opinion multipliers, such as elected officials, representatives of socio-professional groups or national or regional associations and movements, teachers, secondary school pupils and students in higher education.

2. Such groups shall be made up of citizens of the European Union or nationals of applicant countries or former Member States. Furthermore, participants must also be resident in a Member State, applicant country or former Member State. Participation is also open to third-country nationals who fulfil the previous residency criteria.

3. The aim of such visits is to further the participants' knowledge of the European Union in the presence of a speaker made available by the Visits and Seminars Unit and, where appropriate, at least one Member. They shall include a visit to the public gallery.

4. Groups of opinion multipliers invited by the Directorate-General for Communication shall receive a financial contribution in accordance with the provisions of Article 24 of these rules on condition that an appropriate programme is submitted and approved by the Visits and Seminars Unit.

5. Groups may be granted such a financial contribution only once.

6. A list of visitors indicating names and other required personal data shall be submitted, on the appropriate online form, to both the Visits and Seminars Unit and the Security Unit two weeks before the visit. The appropriate online form is provided by DG COMM following data protection standards.

II. (d) Independent visitors' groups

An independent visitors' group may apply to the Visits and Seminars Unit for a visit.
Visits shall last up to two hours (up to three during part-sessions) and consist of an introductory briefing by a member of staff on the work and role of the European Parliament. Members of Parliament may be invited to speak to them.
A list of group visitors indicating names and other required personal data shall be submitted, in the appropriate online form, to both the Visits and Seminars Unit and the Security Unit two weeks before the visit. The appropriate online form is provided by DG COMM following data protection standards.

II. (e) Individual visitors

Article 5

1. Individual visitors may be offered an audio-guided visit to the gallery of the European Parliament's Chamber in Brussels and Strasbourg at designated times and on specific days, outside part-sessions, indicated at Parliament's visitors' entrance. They shall be accompanied by an official EP guide at all times and escorted back to the visitors' entrance at the end of the visit. A valid identity document is required for access to the European Parliament's premises.

2. Access may also be granted to the gallery of the Chamber in Brussels and Strasbourg during part-sessions, subject to the availability of seats.

3. All individual visitors requesting access for the sole purpose of attending a meeting of a parliamentary committee or consulting any register accessible to the public must enter and leave Parliament's premises via the designated entrance. Such visitors must be accompanied by a staff member to and from the meeting room/office.

TITLE III: COMMON PROVISIONS ON THE PROGRAMME OF VISITS

Article 6

1. Applications for visits set out in Title II above shall be made for Brussels and Strasbourg during sessions on the appropriate online form to the Visits and Seminars Unit at least two months prior to the proposed date for the visit.

   Applications for Members' sponsored groups in Strasbourg outside the part-session and accompanied by the sponsoring Member shall be made on the appropriate online form to the Visits and Seminars Unit at least two months prior to the proposed date for the visit.

   Applications for Members' non-sponsored groups in Strasbourg outside the part-session shall be sent to the Visitors and Citizens Liaison Unit in Strasbourg.

2. The Visits and Seminars Unit shall set dates for visits on the basis of the availability of rooms and staff.

Applications for Members' sponsored groups sent within the time limit referred to in the previous paragraph shall be given priority.

3. As regards access to meeting rooms and the public gallery, priority shall be given to Members' sponsored groups. Where any meeting rooms or seats in the public gallery are not occupied by such groups, they shall be made available to the visitors' groups referred to in Articles 3, 4 and 5 of these rules.

TITLE IV: PROVISIONS ON THE EUROSCOLA PROGRAMME

Article 7
Subject matter and objective

1. Under the Euroscola programme, young Europeans are invited to debate and hold mock votes on matters of Community interest.

2. The European civic education provided in this way by the European Parliament, with due respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Member States, helps to develop a European awareness and thus complements teaching provided at national level.

Article 8
Eligibility

1. The Euroscola programme is open to groups of secondary school pupils and their teachers from the Member States. If invited to do so by the Member concerned, Members' sponsored groups may take part in the programme. Young people who are nationals of applicant countries or former Member States are also eligible. Furthermore, participants must also be resident in a Member State, applicant country or former Member State. Participation is also open to third-country nationals who fulfil the previous residency criteria.

2. Groups of pupils wishing to take part in the Euroscola programme shall:

   - be composed of pupils within the age limit laid down in Article 1(4) of these rules;

   - be nominated by one of the European Parliament's Liaison Offices or be selected by the European Parliament's communication services in charge of Euroscola following the submission and consideration of an application form containing a detailed description of the measures implemented or planned by the school concerned in areas relating to the European Union. The communication services in charge of Euroscola may also consider and directly process applications from groups from the applicant countries.

   - comprise a minimum of 10 participants.

Article 9
Organisational arrangements

1. The Euroscola programme shall take place in one of the European Parliament's three places of work, namely Strasbourg, Brussels or Luxembourg.

2. The programme shall consist of the simulation of a day in the life of MEPs, allowing young Europeans to familiarise themselves with the work of committees and 'plenary sittings'. Pupils will be invited to debate and vote on a set of legislative proposals.

3. The debates shall be held mainly in French, German and English.

4. The programme participants shall gain further insight into the functioning of the European Parliament, dialogue with a Member of the European Parliament and debate on topical European issues that matter to the youth.

5. The above arrangements – with particular reference to the simulation exercise and the length of the programme, which may be extended to two days – may be adjusted. However, the programme's objective, as laid down in Article 7(2), shall remain the same.

TITLE V: PROVISIONS ON THE EUROMED-SCOLA AND ON THE EURONEST-SCOLA PROGRAMMES

Article 10
Subject matter and objective

1. Under the EuroMed-Scola programme, young citizens are invited to debate, discuss and adopt resolutions on matters coming under the Barcelona Process and on issues of common interest for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

2. Under the Euronest-Scola programme, young citizens are invited to debate, discuss and adopt resolutions on matters coming under the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in particular the Eastern Partnership, and on issues of common interest for the EU and the Eastern European countries.

3. These meetings organised by the European Parliament with a view to complementing teaching provided in the educational systems of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and of the Eastern Partnership countries help to raise young participants' awareness of the values of dialogue, knowledge and mutual understanding, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, and to provide civic education geared towards democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Article 11
Eligibility

1. The EuroMed-Scola programme is open to secondary school pupils from the EU Member States and from the 10 Barcelona Process partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). Young people who are nationals of EU applicant countries or countries with observer status within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership may also be eligible.

2. The Euronest-Scola programme is open to secondary school pupils from the EU Member States and from the six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

3. Pupils wishing to take part in the EuroMed-Scola programme or, respectively, in the Euronest-Scola programme, shall:

   a) be at least 16 and no more than 18 years of age when the event in question is held;

b) be selected, following submission and consideration of an application, by the competent European Parliament departments (DG EXPO, DG COMM) in close collaboration with:

- the European Parliament Liaison Offices, as regards the pupils in the European component;

- the European Union Delegations in the Mediterranean or Eastern European partner countries and/or secretariats of national parliaments and/or embassies/delegations to the EU or consular services of Mediterranean and Eastern European partner countries in Brussels or Strasbourg, as regards the pupils in the Mediterranean or in the Eastern European component;

- where appropriate, Euro-Mediterranean or, respectively, Eastern European civil society organisations/associations, or Euro-Mediterranean or Eastern European research institutes and/or foundations;

c) have sufficient knowledge of at least one of the following languages (other than their mother tongue): English, French or Modern Standard Arabic for the Euromed-Scola programme, or English, French, German or Russian for the Euronest-Scola programme;

d) describe, in the application, the measures taken or planned in the establishment attended during the school year to research topics of interest for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or, respectively, for the Eastern Partnership.

4. For Euromed-Scola, the total number of participants should not exceed 240-260 pupils (at most) so as to reflect the balance within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for Mediterranean (PA UfM) as regards representation of the northern and southern Mediterranean littorals, i.e.:

   - half to be pupils who are nationals of one of the 27 EU Member States (120 pupils, four or five per country, one school per country, if an interest in taking part is expressed by schools from all Member States; if not, there must be provision for adjustments);

   - half to be pupils who are nationals of one of the 10 Mediterranean partner countries (120 pupils, 12 per country, from no more than two schools per country, if an interest in taking part is expressed by schools from all Mediterranean partner countries; if not, there must be provision for adjustments).

5. For Euronest-Scola, the total number of participants should not exceed 150-160 pupils (at most) so as to reflect the balance within the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly between the representatives of the EU and of the Eastern European component, i.e.:

   - half to be pupils who are nationals of one of the 27 EU Member States (81-84 pupils, three per country, one school per country, if an interest in taking part is expressed by schools from all Member States; if not, there must be provision for adjustments);

   - half to be pupils who are nationals of one of the six Eastern European partner countries (72 pupils, 12 per country, from no more than two schools per country, if an interest in taking part is expressed by schools from all Eastern European partner countries; if not, there must be provision for adjustments).

6. Parliament operates an equal opportunities policy and thus seeks to ensure that male and female participation is balanced.

Article 12
Organisational arrangements

1. The EuroMed-Scola and Euronest-Scola programmes shall take place each year, on an alternating basis, on the European Parliament's premises in Strasbourg or Brussels, with the exception of election years.

2. The programme shall consist of the simulation of a day or, at most, two days in the life of PA UfM or Euronest PA members, with the young people invited as indicated above to take part in ‘committee meetings’ and then in a ‘plenary sitting’ during which they debate and adopt resolutions.

3. The debates shall be held mainly in French, English and Modern Standard Arabic for the Euromed-Scola programme (these being the PA UfM working languages) and in English, French, German and Russian for the Euronest-Scola programme (these being the Euronest PA working languages). At the opening sitting, the spokesperson appointed by each class shall be asked to introduce the class.

4. For Euromed-Scola/Euronest-Scola, each class (or group if there are several classes) shall, where possible, be divided into groups, along the lines of the PA UfM/Euronest PA standing committees, with each pupil belonging to no more than one group. The programme participants shall thus form committees of a similar size, which shall then be asked to discuss topical Euro-Mediterranean/Eastern Partnership issues concerning areas such as political cooperation, economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, energy cooperation or civil society and people-to-people contacts.

5. At the end of the day (or during the second day), the pupils shall convene in plenary sitting to move, debate and adopt the resolutions drawn up during the committee meetings. Each committee shall be represented by its appointed rapporteur.

6. The above arrangements may be altered, if need be, with a view to ensuring that the event concerned proceeds in the best possible fashion. However, the programme’s objective, as laid down in Article 10(2), shall remain the same. Apart from committee meetings and plenary sitting, the programme may include parallel educational activities for the participants on how the European Parliament and the EU operate and on the history of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or, respectively, of the Eastern Partnership.

TITLE VI: FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

VI. (a) Financial contributions granted to Members’ sponsored groups

Article 13
General principles underpinning the financial contribution

1. The European Parliament shall grant Members’ sponsored groups a financial contribution, subject to availability of funds in the budget and in compliance with the provisions of these rules and with certain principles set out in the Financial Regulation (hereinafter referred to as 'the FR') with regard to grants, taking account of the specific features of the European Parliament's visitor reception programme. Those principles relate in particular to no-profit arrangements (Article 192 FR), non-cumulative awards (Article 191 FR), criteria for eligible costs (Article 186(3) FR), payment conditions and controls (Articles 202 and 131 FR) and periods for keeping supporting documents (Article 132 FR). Visitors sponsored under this specific programme must be residents of an EU Member State, applicant country or former Member State.

Subject to a derogation granted by the Quaestor responsible for visitors' groups, Members are also entitled to financially sponsor groups from the 'Neighbourhood' countries.

The financial contribution is intended to cover up to the maximum amount defined in article 16 of the eligible expenditure incurred for a visit by a sponsored group to the European Parliament, in particular travel, accommodation and meal expenses plus local minor expenses for a sponsored group. The types of and ceilings for eligible expenditure are laid down in Annex I to these rules. On a proposal from the Secretary-General, the Quaestors may adjust the ceilings in line with changes in the costs to be covered.

2. Payment of this financial contribution shall be made in accordance with the provisions of Articles 14 to 23 of these rules. The financial contribution shall not be payable if the number of sponsored visitors present for the visit is under 10.

   A special derogation to this rule may be made by the Quaestor responsible for visitors' groups.

Article 14
Principle underpinning use of the financial contribution

The financial contribution shall be all-inclusive and cover the various types of eligible expenditure, without distinction and without exceeding the amount of expenses actually incurred (meaning, for example, that groups may book more than one night’s accommodation), regardless of the share accounted for by each cost factor in the initial calculation.

Article 15
Principle of substantiated expenditure

Travel and accommodation expenses shall be established on the basis of supporting documents for costs actually incurred (invoices paid).

The cost of meals and local minor expenses shall be established on a flat-rate basis; no supporting documents shall be needed unless, having regard to the total number of group visitors, those costs and expenses exceed EUR 48 per person.

Article 16
Principle underpinning calculation of the financial contribution

The maximum financial contribution that a sponsored group may receive shall be calculated as follows: number of sponsored visitors present multiplied by aggregate entitlement to the three cost factors: travel (EUR 0.108 per kilometre), accommodation (EUR 72) and local minor expenses (EUR 48).

Article 17
Travel factor

1. The travel factor shall be calculated by multiplying the number of sponsored visitors present by a specific distance and a kilometric rate.

2. That rate shall be EUR 0.108 per kilometre. It shall be applied to the distance for the most direct return road journey between the town of common departure of the group and the place visited. In the absence of a common point of departure, the average distance of the residence of all the participants in the group shall be calculated as the total distance of all visitors divided by the number of eligible visitors.

3. On a proposal from the Secretary-General, the Quaestors may adjust the kilometric rate in line with changes in the costs to be covered.

4. For groups from 'Neighbourhood' countries, referred to in Article 13, the kilometric rate shall be calculated on the basis of a journey from the capital of the country where the MEP concerned was elected.

5. The tool used to calculate the distances between the point of departure and the European Parliament shall be an internet-based application calculating objective and transparent distances. The calculation of the travel distance shall be made on the basis of the most direct return journey.

6. The kilometric rate shall not apply to visitors' groups from the French Overseas Departments and Territories. The rate applicable to such groups shall be based on an estimate from two different airlines, submitted at least two months before the date of the visit, of the air fare payable by groups travelling in economy class. Payment shall be made on the basis of the following supporting documents: electronic versions or photocopies of boarding cards, passports and airline tickets.

Article 18
Other cost factors

1. The other cost factors are meals and local minor expenses and accommodation.

2. For the purposes of calculating the financial contribution, the meals and minor local expenses factor shall be a flat rate of EUR 48 per sponsored visitor.

3. For the purposes of calculating the financial contribution, the accommodation factor shall be a flat rate of EUR 72 per sponsored visitor. This entitlement shall not apply if the group does not stay overnight.

4. On a proposal from the Secretary-General, the Quaestors may adjust the ceilings for the accommodation factor and the meals and local minor expenses factor in line with changes in the costs to be covered.

Article 19
Payment methods

1. The financial contribution shall be paid by bank transfer only. It shall be paid in two instalments: 70% at the day of the visit and the balance upon receipt of Annex II.

2. Transfer shall be to a bank account held by the head of group designated by the Member concerned, and present on the day of the visit, or held by the group itself, or optionally, on the basis of a contract with the Member concerned, by a paying agent or a travel agency. The MEP shall ensure, in the light of Article 196(1) of the Financial Regulation, that the head of group, the group or the travel agency has the financial and operational capacity to carry out the visit.

Members of the European Parliament may not be designated heads of group or receive a financial contribution as part of a group.

Transfer to the bank account held by a group is possible, provided that the group has a bank account and that the name of the sponsored group matches the bank account holder's name.

That option shall not be available to European or national political parties or to European or national political groups or foundations.

Article 20
Declaration of eligible expenditure and no-profit principle

1. In accordance with the no-profit principle, the European Parliament's final financial contribution may not exceed total eligible expenditure actually incurred by the sponsored group concerned.

   Expenditure incurred by a group in respect of accompanying visitors shall also be eligible, provided that they are members of the same group and take part in the entire programme provided for in Article 2(4).

   Only a group's expenditure incurred for the visit to the European Parliament shall be eligible expenditure.

   Any surplus shall be declared without prompting and paid back to the European Parliament.

2. On the day of the visit, the head of group shall sign a declaration.

   He or she shall undertake to declare any public contributions received other than those granted through the European Parliament's Visits and Seminars Unit.

   He or she shall undertake to provide Parliament within 30 days following the visit, using Annex II to these rules, with details of the eligible expenditure actually incurred so that the final financial contribution can be established. Should that deadline not be met, Parliament reserves the right to recover the entire contribution paid. Copies of supporting documents, either in paper or electronic format, will be attached.

   The head of group shall also undertake to pay back any surplus constituting the difference between the total financial contribution received and the sponsored group's eligible expenditure actually incurred.

   Any public financial contributions received for the group from another source shall be deducted from that expenditure, and the surplus to be repaid shall be in proportion to the European Parliament's contribution.

   The head of group shall certify that the information contained in the declaration is complete, reliable and true.

   For a period of three years, he or she shall keep all supporting documents relating to costs actually incurred as referred to in Article 15 (list of participants, invoices paid, travel documents, proof of payment); they may be checked.

   In accordance with Articles 202 and 131 FR, the amount of the financial contribution shall not become final until after Parliament has approved the final expenditure accounts, without prejudice to subsequent checks carried out in a timely manner.

3. The European Parliament shall issue a certificate establishing the source, amount and purpose of the financial contribution granted.

Article 21
Paying agent

1. Members may call on the services of a professional paying agent.

2. The paying agent selected by the Member concerned shall be financially responsible for the visitor group. Organisational responsibility shall continue to lie with the head of group, who, as the Member prefers, may be a member of that group or an accredited or local parliamentary assistant.

3. The services of a paying agent shall be provided under a contract, based on a standard contract approved by the competent authorising officer, between that person and the Member concerned. Paying agents' fees shall be capped. They shall constitute eligible expenditure covered by the financial contribution. Fee payment arrangements shall be governed by the contract.

   Any new version of the standard contract shall be mandatory after it has been communicated to Members.

4. The Member and the head of group present on the day of the visit shall provide the paying agent with all the documents and information needed for the performance of his or her duties.

   Those duties shall consist in certifying that the group's expenditure is in line with the European Parliament's rules on sponsored visitor groups, in receiving the transfer of the European Parliament's financial contribution, and in making disbursements to third parties who have incurred eligible expenditure.

   The duties constitute a procedure, set out in detail in the standard contract, for certifying a sponsored group's eligible expenditure.

Article 22
Travel agency

1. Members may call on the services of a travel agency to organise visits and act as head of group for their sponsored groups.

2. The Member concerned shall hire a travel agency which shall appoint a legal representative as head of group. The travel agency shall bear organisational and financial management responsibility for the sponsored group. The travel agency shall receive the transfer for the financial contribution on a bank account it holds, in its capacity as a legal person, in order to make disbursements from it to third parties who have incurred eligible expenditure.

3. Members shall select travel agencies enrolled in a relevant professional or trade register, in particular because of their statutory obligations to assist their clients in the event of force majeure or failings on the part of transport operators or hotels.

The services of a travel agency shall be provided under a standard contract, approved by the competent authorising officer, between that travel agency and the Member concerned. The reimbursement of the expenses made by the Members' sponsored groups and payment of the travel agency's fees for organisational and head-of-group services shall be governed by the contract and shall only be made if such contract has been concluded before the provision of the travel agency's services.

Any new version of the standard contract shall be mandatory after it has been communicated to Members.

4. Travel agency's fees for organisational and head-of-group services shall be set out on a separate invoice to the beneficiary group. Travel agency's fees for organisational and head-of-group services shall be capped as laid down in Annex I to these rules and shall be included in the maximum total contribution. They shall constitute eligible expenditure covered by the financial contribution.

5. Making use of a travel agency to act as head of group can neither be combined with the designation of an individual as head of group under Article 19(2) nor with the services of a professional paying agent under article 21.

Article 23

1. Where the budgetary appropriations earmarked for this purpose so permit, in cases where the financial contribution fails to cover additional expenditure, visitors with a recognised disability shall be entitled to an additional financial contribution up to the maximum financial contribution per visitor with a recognised disability, on production of the relevant documentation. The additional financial contribution may be requested in the following cases: where they are accompanied by a sign language interpreter; where they are in a wheelchair and require special assistance; and where they require special arrangements to be made, within reason, in order to be able to travel comfortably.

2. The additional financial contribution provided to visitors with a recognised disability as indicated in the previous paragraph shall not result in any reduction of the quota of officially sponsored visitors per Member. It will be calculated on the basis of actual costs incurred as a result of participation in the visit, and will be paid by bank transfer only after the receipt and validation of the final declaration of expenditure.

VI. (b) Financial contributions granted to groups of opinion multipliers invited by the Directorate-General for Communication

Article 24

1. Subject to the availability of funds in the budget, the Directorate-General for Communication shall grant financial contributions to visitors within the meaning of Article 4, to cover part of the group's travel expenses.

2. The amount for the travel factor shall be equal to 50 % of the kilometric rate provided for in Articles 16 and 17, multiplied by the number of visitors actually present, up to a maximum of 40 participants. Payment of the financial contribution shall be made in accordance with the provisions of Articles 14 to 16, 18 to 20 and 23.

VI. (c) Financial arrangements applying specifically to the Euroscola programme

Article 25

1. Subject to the availability of funds in the budget, the financial contribution shall be calculated using the method applying to groups of opinion multipliers (see Article 24).

2. Qualified and selected participants for the Euroscola programme shall be entitled to full reimbursement. The financial contribution, up to a maximum of 26 participants per school, shall be calculated using the method applying to visitors of Members' sponsored groups. Rules governing organisational and selection procedures shall be drawn up prior to the qualification process.

3. No more than one accompanying adult per 10 pupils and one local journalist for the entire group shall be authorised to take part in the Euroscola programme. Such persons shall be covered over and above the maximum number of participants authorised to travel for each country. Further adults may be present as observers, but the European Parliament shall not bear any costs relating to their presence. In the case of pupils with a disability, the number of adults may be increased.

4. The financial contribution in connection with travel expenses shall be paid by bank transfer to the head of the group. The provisions on the use of a travel agency as head of group as foreseen for Member-sponsored groups do not apply to Euroscola groups. The bank account for the bank transfer should be one of the school, not a private one of a teacher.

5. In exceptional cases where the duration of the programme is extended to two days requiring two overnight stays, an additional financial contribution for meal and accommodation expenses shall be granted.

VI. (d) Financial arrangements applying specifically to the EuroMed-Scola and to the Euronest-Scola programmes

Article 26

1. Subject to the availability of funds in the budget, the travel expenses to be paid to pupils from EU educational establishments shall be calculated using the method applying to groups of opinion multipliers (see Article 24). The travel expenses of the pupils from educational establishments in the Mediterranean or Eastern European partner countries shall be calculated in accordance with the provisions of Article 17(6) (i.e. visitors from the French Overseas Departments and Territories - economy-class air ticket).

2. Should a national competition be held in order to select participants for the EuroMed-Scola or Euronest-Scola programmes, the successful candidates shall be entitled to full reimbursement; this shall be calculated using the method applying to Members' sponsored groups. The travel expenses of the pupils from educational establishments in the Mediterranean or Eastern European partner countries shall be calculated in accordance with the provisions of Article 17(6) (i.e. visitors from the French Overseas Departments and Territories - economy-class air ticket).

3. The authorising officer may allow the direct payment of airline tickets issued to Euromed-Scola/Euronest-Scola participants, provided these bookings have been processed by the European Parliament's travel office. If not, Article 26(5) will apply.

4. For groups of up to 10 pupils, no more than one accompanying adult shall be authorised to take part in the EuroMed-Scola or in the Euronest-Scola programme. For groups of more than 10 pupils, a second accompanying adult shall be authorised to take part. In the interests of equal opportunities, one accompanying adult shall be male, the other female. Further adults may be present as observers, but the European Parliament shall not bear any costs relating to their presence. In the case of pupils with a disability, the number of adults may be increased.

5. The accommodation and meals arrangements provided for Article 18 shall apply to Euromed-Scola and Euronest-Scola participants except when the authorising officer organises and directly pays the providers of such services.

6. The travel expenses to be reimbursed shall be paid by bank transfer to an/the accompanying adult.

7. In exceptional cases where the duration of the programme is extended to two days requiring 2 overnight stays, an additional financial contribution for meal and accommodation shall be granted. Additional nights may only be considered to adapt to airline flight constraints, if justified on a cost-effective basis.

TITLE VII: FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 27

The Director-General for Communication shall be responsible for implementing these rules.

Article 28

These Rules shall enter into force on 1 January 2024. They cancel and replace all previous rules.

ANNEX I TO THE RULES GOVERNING THE RECEPTION OF GROUPS OF VISITORS TYPES OF ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURE AND CEILINGS

1. This annex lays down the types of eligible expenditure and the ceilings for financial contributions towards the expenses incurred by sponsored visitor groups when visiting the European Parliament, with reference to Articles 2, 13, 17 and 18 of the Rules governing the reception of groups of visitors.

2. The expenditure must be actually incurred by sponsored visitors and visitors accompanying the group, by the head of group, by the paying agent, by the travel agency designated by the Member as head of group or by the Member in respect of amounts paid out as eligible expenditure of the group.

   For Euroscola groups no travel agency can be mandated as group responsible. No fees for a travel agency are eligible other than booking fees.

3. Eligibility period: the goods or services giving rise to the expenditure must have been provided during the period covered by the visit to the European Parliament.

4. Nature of eligible expenditure and ceilings.
   See table below.

EXPENDITURE	TYPE	CEILINGS
Travel expenses	Main journey: means of transport used to travel, in both directions, between the point of departure and the Parliament place of work to be visited (Brussels/Strasbourg/Luxembourg), e.g. train, aircraft or coach chartered by the group (usually between railway stations, bus stations, airports or group meeting points).	Economy class if the type of transport is available in more than one class.
	Final local transport, in both directions: between the Parliament place of work visited (Brussels/Strasbourg/Luxembourg) and the departure point for the main journey: railway station, bus station, airport, group meeting point, etc.	Economy class if the type of transport is available in more than one class.
	Expenses: the cost of the tickets themselves, reservation charges, handling fees, charges for issuing tickets, compulsory insurance, exchange rate differences, other unavoidable expenses and the cost of optional cancellation insurance.[4]	
Accommodation expenses	Costs of overnight stays at hotel- or youth-hostel type establishments or similar professionally run establishments.	Maximum of EUR 120 per person per overnight stay, inclusive of all costs.
	Costs of stays at campsites or in rental accommodation arranged between private individuals.	Maximum of EUR 120 per person per overnight stay, inclusive of all costs.

[4] At its meeting of 24 October 2016 the Bureau decided that these expenses also cover bank charges incurred by parliamentary assistants designated as heads of group: bank charges whose type and amount can be identified and which are specific to a transaction linked to a group of visitors, or fixed bank charges specific to a personal bank account used exclusively for transactions linked to groups of visitors.

	Expenses: cost of the stay or overnight stay itself, possibly including breakfast, charges for optional cancellation insurance, booking fees and other direct charges levied by the hotel or the owner. Where a deposit has to be paid as a guarantee against material damage, that deposit is not eligible expenditure, whether charged to a credit card or paid by cash or transfer.	
Meals and local minor expenses	Food expenses (meals up to a maximum of EUR 48 per person per meal, snacks, refreshments, etc.), underground tickets, bus tickets, taxi fares or shuttle bus fares within the city where the visit to Parliament is taking place (not linked to local transport expenses).	If the expenditure exceeds EUR 48 per person over the period of the visit, the excess, provided that it was spent on food, is eligible on the basis of substantiating documents, which must be kept as evidence of actual expenditure incurred.
Paying agent (optional)	Invoiced fees, in accordance with the contract concluded with the Member.	Maximum of 10% of the financial contribution, but not more than EUR 1 800 excl. VAT per group - invoiced paying agent's fee to be submitted with Annex II declaration.
	or	
Travel agency designated head of group (optional and not for Euroscola groups)	Invoiced agency charges, including handling fees, charges for issuing tickets, reservation fees, administrative charges and the cost of optional cancellation insurance (on condition that the latter is not already included by travel operators or hoteliers).	Maximum of 10% of the financial contribution, but not more than EUR 1 800 excl. VAT per group - invoiced travel agency's fee to be submitted with Annex II declaration.

Annex II: Declaration to serve as the basis for establishing the final financial contribution payable to a sponsored visitor group at the European Parliament

1. I, the undersigned, ***Name Forename***,
   Head of group/Paying agent/Legal representative of the travel agency ***Name of the travel agency*** (delete as appropriate)
   hereby certify, in keeping with the Bureau decision of day month year laying down the rules governing the reception of groups of visitors at the European Parliament, that I incurred the following eligible expenditure in the context of the visit of / / to the European Parliament in ***Place of visit*** by visitor group ***Name of visitor group***.

Number of sponsored visitors: XX **Number of accompanying visitors: YY**				
Eligible expenditure (in accordance with the relevant annex to the Rules on the reception of visitor groups)	**Description**	**Amount paid**	**Amount (in EUR)[5]**	
Travel expenses				**Supporting documents to be kept for 3 years**
Accommodation expenses				
Paying agent				
Travel agency designated as head of group				
Only food expenses in excess of EUR 48/visitor/ visit - the applied ceiling **will be EUR 48/per visitor/per** meal-supporting document to be kept for 3 years				
Food expenses and local minor expenses up to EUR 48/visitor/per visit for the entire visit.				**No supporting document required**
	Total eligible expenditure in euros (A)			

2. I also declare receipt of the following financial contributions for the visitor group.

Amount <u>in euros</u> of the initial contribution paid by the European Parliament towards the cost of the group's visit	**B**	
Amount <u>in euros</u> of any public financial contribution received from another source: *<u>Name of the body</u>*	**C**	
Total amount in euros of the financial contribution received	**D = B + C**	

[5] Monthly conversion rate set by the Commission:
http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/index_en.cfm

3. If no public financial contribution has been received from another source, the final amount in euros of the financial contribution paid by the European Parliament (final contribution) will not exceed an amount which corresponds to the lesser of the following amounts, either the contribution initially paid (B) or the total eligible expenditure (A):

• ***If A > B then final contribution = B*** • ***If A < B then final contribution = A***	**Final contribution = EUR**

If a public financial contribution has been received from another source, the relevant European Parliament departments will communicate the final amount in euros of the financial contribution paid.

4. **If *Final contribution* < B, I undertake to pay back the balance (B - *Final contribution*) to the European Parliament following receipt of the debit note drawn up on the basis of this declaration. The debit note will set out the arrangements for paying back the balance.**

5. I am aware that this declaration may be checked by the relevant departments of the European Parliament or the Court of Auditors of the European Union during the three years following the date of its receipt by the European Parliament.

The head of group/Paying agent/Legal representative of the travel agency

Done at

On

Signature

Reserved for the Administration:

- Date of receipt of the declaration:

- Final financial contribution: _____ EUR

/ /

Approval of the authorising officer